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Alabama Armory Is Checked for Any Gear Diverted to Latins

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HUNTSVILLE, Ala.—The Alabama National Guard has begun a careful audit of supplies in its armory here to determine if equipment was diverted to a paramilitary group formed to aid anti-Communist forces in Central America.

The Pentagon on Friday confirmed the investigation into the activities of William Courtney of Huntsville, a full-time National Guard supply officer and one of seven Americans who traveled to Honduras last week to assist the rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista government. Two of the seven were killed when a helicopter in which they were flying was shot down by Nicaraguan forces.

Access to Equipment

The National Guard bureau in Washington said the audit was ordered because of Courtney's special access to military equipment, even though there is no evidence that any supplies have been misappropriated. Courtney is a captain in the National Guard's Special Forces (Green Beret) unit in addition to his full-time job as part of the team that maintains the armory between weekend drills.

Courtney and his six colleagues traveled to Central America as members of Civilian Military Assistance, a group founded by Thomas Posey, a Decatur, Ala., produce dealer, to help the governments of El Salvador and Honduras and anti-government rebels in Nicaragua.

Posey says his group has sent about \$60,000 to \$70,000 worth of provisions, including medical supplies, military uniforms and boots.

He also said the group has helped train troops.

The State Department confirmed Friday that U.S. Embassy staff members in El Salvador and Honduras provided assistance to Posey and his colleagues on several occasions over a period of almost a year. The help included English-Spanish translations and introductions to local government officials.

There were some contacts between Mr. Posey and his group and certain officials of the U.S. embassies in San Salvador and Tegucigalpa, the capitals of El Salvador and Honduras, State Department spokesman John Hughes said.

He said that Posey told the embassies he wanted to supply "non-lethal" military equipment to the two countries, which both have pro-American governments faced with leftist rebels.

However, Hughes reiterated that the government provided no assistance last week to the group during its ill-fated excursion to Central America.

Posey said the purpose of the trip was to provide military training to rebel troops fighting against the Nicaraguan government. Two of the party, Dana H. Parker, a Huntsville police officer and member of the Huntsville-based National Guard Green Beret unit to which Courtney belonged, and James Powell, a Memphis pilot, were killed when their helicopter was shot down during a raid on a Nicaraguan government military training base.

Posey said in an interview that all of the members of his group are volunteers who pay for their missions out of their own pockets. But colleagues of Parker on the Huntsville police department said he expected to be paid.

One source, who asked not to be identified, said Parker, who had been on earlier missions to Central America, believe he was working for the U.S. government, probably the Central Intelligence Agency. "He saw a black helicopter down there, and to him that said CIA," the source said.

As details emerged of the activities of Posey's group, speculation grew in Washington that—despite the official denials—the CIA might have been involved. The agency

provided extensive aid to the anti-Sandinista rebels for almost three years before the "secret war" became common knowledge and Congress cut off funds to aid the rebels last May.

A Pentagon official said privately that it would have been very unlikely that Posey could have done what he did without some kind of official sanction.

Shipped by Mail

Meanwhile, John M. Walker Jr., assistant Treasury secretary for enforcement, said Posey apparently slipped through a crack in the regulations that normally would bar private export of arms.

He said Posey held a valid license as a domestic arms dealer. At the time he received the permit, Walker said, Posey was informed that he would have to receive State Department approval to send weapons out of the country. He apparently never did.

"But it turns out that Posey shipped supplies by mail," Walker said. "Currently Customs has no right to inspect outbound mail without a warrant or court order. . . . Mail is the jurisdiction of the Postal Service."

Since last weekend's incident, Posey has maintained that his group went to the Honduran-Nicaraguan border only to train the rebels, not to fight.

Meanwhile, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the formal name of the rebel group, issued a statement in Washington asserting that the weekend raid had damaged an important Sandinista training base in Nicaragua. The organization said that a number of Sandinista troops were killed along with 16 Cuban and seven Libyan advisers.

The group insisted that only Nicaraguans engaged in combat on its side. Asked what Parker and Powell were doing when their helicopter was shot down, Bosco Matamoros, Washington spokesman for the group, said they were training a rebel pilot in the use of a helicopter for medical evacuation purposes.